

## Message Text

SECRET

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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9169  
INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

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LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINR BM

SUBJ: INDICATIONS OF DETERIORATION IN NE WIN'S MENTAL AND PHYSICAL  
WELL-BEING

1. SUMMARY. SEVERAL RECENT REPORTS HAVE SUGGESTED THE POSSIBILITY THAT NE WIN'S PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING MAY BE SLIPPING SOMEWHAT, AND THAT HIS ISOLATION FROM REALITY, ALWAYS SIGNIFICANT, IS INCREASING. IF IT CONTINUES, THIS TREND COULD FORESHADOW HIS VOLUNTARY OR INVOLUNTARY DEPARTURE FROM THE SCENE. END SUMMARY.

2. DEPARTING AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR WOODARD DESCRIBED HIS FAREWELL CALL ON PRESIDENT NE WIN IN SEPARATE CONVERSATIONS WITH AMBASSADOR AND DCM. MOST OF NE WIN'S COMMENTS CENTERED ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND WOODARD

FOUND HIM EVEN LESS STATESMANLIKE THAN IN PREVIOUS CONVERSATIONS, E.G., EXPLAINING THE GUB'S RELUCTANCE TO ACCEPT CLOSER ASSOCIATION WITH ASEAN BECAUSE "BIG BROTHER WOULDN'T LIKE IT" (THE PRC). HIS TREATMENT OF BURMA'S DOMESTIC POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC WOES WAS EVEN MORE OFFHANDED. HE BRUSHED ASIDE WOODARD'S QUERIES ABOUT BURMA'S ECONOMIC PROSPECTS AND THE IMPACT OF THE DETERIORATING SITUATION ON THE POPULACE WITH THE COMMENT "AS LONG AS THEY (THE BURMESE PEOPLE) HAVE ENOUGH RICE TO EAT, THEY'LL BE ALL RIGHT."

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3. ACCORDING TO A SOURCE WHO ACCOMPANIED NE WIN ON HIS TRIP IN

LATE JANUARY TO PEARL ISLAND, THE PRESIDENT DURING THE NIGHT WAS RESTLESS AND CHANGED FREQUENTLY AMONG THREE BEDROOMS WHICH HAD BEEN PREPARED FOR HIM. OTHER SURROUNDING ROOMS WERE KEPT EMPTY EXCEPT FOR BODYGUARDS. AT ONE POINT NE WIN COMPLAINED OF DIZZINESS. AT MEALS HE DISPLAYED A HABIT OF REJECTING THE FIRST DISH OF WHATEVER WAS PUT BEFORE HIM, LEADING HIS STAFF TO CONCLUDE THAT HE FEARED BEING POISONED.

4. EX-BRIG. AUNG GYI, WHO SAW NE WIN IN NOVEMBER, LATER TOLD FRIENDS THAT THE PRESIDENT COMPLAINED OF BEING IN POOR HEALTH AND FATIGUED. HE ALSO SHOWED IRRITATION OVER WHAT HE DESCRIBED AS THE INCOMPETENCE OF HIS PRINCIPAL ASSOCIATES. MORE RECENTLY, SINCE THE U THANT AFFAIR, A HOST OF RUMORS HAVE CIRCULATED THAT NE WIN IS SERIOUSLY CONCERNED OVER ALLEGED PREDICTIONS BY ASTROLOGERS THAT HE WILL NOT LIVE, OR AT LEAST HOLD POWER, THROUGH 1975. ALTHOUGH THESE STORIES IN THEMSELVES ARE WORTHLESS AS EVIDENCE, IT WOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH THE SUPERSTITIOUS SIDE OF NE WIN'S CHARACTER IF HE DID REACT TO GLOOMY PREDICTIONS ABOUT HIS PERSONAL FUTURE.

5. COMMENT: IT IS POSSIBLE OF COURSE THAT NE WIN'S ATTITUDE TO WOODARD STEMMED SIMPLY FROM RELUCTANCE TO DISCUSS BURMA'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS WITH A FOREIGNER. IN COMBINATION WITH OTHER REPORTS, HOWEVER, THIS LATEST PEEK INTO NE WIN'S THINKING TENDS TO SUPPORT THE THESIS THAT THE PRESIDENT IS WITHDRAWING INCREASINGLY INTO SELF-IMPOSED ISOLATION AS HIS HYPOCHONDRIA, IF NOT HIS HEALTH, WORSENS. HIS REPUTATION FOR POLITICAL ACUMEN HAS BEEN TARNISHED BY HIS MISHANDLING OF THE U THANT AFFAIR AND BY WORSENING ECONOMIC CONDITIONS. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE YET TO IDENTIFY ANY ELEMENT WITHIN THE POWER STRUCTURE READYING ITSELF FOR SELF-PROPELLED SUCCESSION, NE WIN'S DRIFT AWAY FROM THE REAL WORLD MAY BE HELPING TO LAY THE FOUNDATION FOR SUCH A MOVE EVENTUALLY. RUMORS OF COUPS, ONCE A RARITY IN SPITE OF THE REGIME'S UNPOPULARITY, ARE NOW COMMONPLACE, THOUGH INSUBSTANTIAL.

6. ANOTHER POSSIBILITY, WHICH STRIKES US AS IMPROBABLE, BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE, IS THAT NE WIN, IN A MOOD OF DISGRUNTLEMENT, MAY SIMPLY ABDICATE AND LEAVE THE COUNTRY. HE IS ABOUT DUE FOR ANOTHER EUROPEAN TRIP, HOWEVER, AND THAT MAY RESTORE HIS MORALE AND EQUANIMITY SOMEWHAT.

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